

# AN INVESTIGATION OF MACROLINGUISTIC ERRORS IN INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' ESSAYS

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## Abstract

This present study tries to investigate macrolinguistic errors and to know the possible causes of the errors committed by Indonesian EFL Learners in their essay writing. This study employed qualitative approach with content analysis method. The data were taken from 40 university students' essay and interview in one public university located in Banten province. The result of the data analysis reveals that the students commit seven types of error at the discoursal level and two types of error at the pragmatic level. In the discoursal level, the students committed run-on sentences, unawareness of logical relation, poor paragraph development, cohesion problem as well as coherence problem, improper use of discourse markers, and absence of parallel structure. In the pragmatic level, the researchers found miss-selection of lexical item and violation of the cooperative principles. Moreover, the possible causes of the errors included students have lack interest in writing; inadequate grammatical mastery; arranging ideas in a meaningful and logical order; lack of vocabulary and formulating their idea of writing. It is hoped that the result of this study can be the consideration for both the teachers when they design the material, and students to recognize their weaknesses in doing the writing and find the best solution to cope with this problem.

**Keywords:** *macrolinguistic error; students' essay; Indonesia EFL Learners*

## Introduction

Writing is one method of communicating our ideas and feelings on a piece of paper as well as organizing our knowledge and conveying meaning through well-constructed textual content. Writing is the

cognitive process of generating ideas and selecting how to communicate them in reader-friendly sentences and paragraphs. (Nunan, 2003). By mastering writing skill, one can communicate their ideas, knowledge, and feelings to others, particularly in written form.

However, mastering writing, particularly writing in an academic context, is a difficult task. A number of factors became the reason one of which is differences in academic registers. They are interpreted and comprehended differently from country to country. In the same vein, a wide social as well as psychological distance between foreign language and target language has also the negative attitudes. In addition, writing is regarded to be cognitively a complex process especially in the acquisition of academic vocabulary and style of discourse (Klimova, 2014).

In enhancing students' writing competence, particularly foreign language learners, it will cover some sub skills in writing including writing mechanics as well as discourse skills. The teachers usually only focus on microlinguistic level such as grammatical accuracy, punctuation, spelling, writing mechanics but neglected the macrolinguistic level which focus on communicative competence which usually focus on pragmatic and discourse competence (Fareh, 2014).

The ability to grasp and construct utterances that are truthful and acceptable to the social and cultural contexts in which communication occurs is known as pragmatic competence (Deda, 2013). Pragmatic competences are associated with the ability of speakers in using a language by considering the context where the utterances are performed both spoken and written. Furthermore, it is also associated with both spoken and written discourse such as cohesion, coherence, reference, politeness principle, cooperative principle as well as turn-taking conventions. Whereas discourse competence is the capability to perceive and produce language that is more complex than a single sentence (Richard, 2006). It relates to the capacity to identify and organize lexical words as well as grammatical structures to produce well-formed texts.

To date, there have been many studies which focus on investigating the performance of EFL learners in writing (Sermsook, et. al., 2017; Sadiyah & Royani, 2019; Kumala, et. al., 2018). However, those studies mainly focused on microlinguistic errors or grammatical errors committed by the students. There are still a few studies discussed problems at macrolinguistic errors especially in the essay of EFL

learners. Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap by focusing on investigating macrolinguistic errors committed by Indonesian EFL learners' essays.

## **Literature Review**

### **Macrolinguistic Errors**

Macrolinguistics is the study of meanings and how the language and meaning function within social systems. The goal of macrolinguistic is to achieve a scientific understanding of how people communicate. It is concerned with the external view of language in relation to other sciences, as well as how to apply it in everyday life. Macrolinguistics in composition concerns about coherence and cohesion of their writing. Macrolinguistic error in writing is macrolinguistic problem covers to discourse and pragmatic error faced by the student in writing English essays (Fareh, 2014). Consequently, macrolinguistic errors lead to the reader's difficulties in understanding the whole text in the essay.

### **Discourse Error**

Discourse error occurs when a person's ability to comprehend, generate, and develop larger stretches of language, such as paragraphs, essays, short tales, discussions, and dialogues, is insufficient (Fareh, 2014). Run-on sentences, a lack of understanding of the logical relationship between sentences, poor paragraph development or coherence issues, cohesion issues, and improper use of inter-sentential connectives or discourse markers are all examples of common discourse errors made by students.

### **Run-on Sentence**

When two or more independent clauses are not connected appropriately, the result is a run-on sentence. A sequence of words that can stand alone as a sentence is known as an independent clause. When students use a comma instead of a full stop or a semicolon to link phrases together, this is known as a run-on sentence (Fareh, 2014).

There are four possible solutions to the problem of a run-on sentence. To combine two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet, so, or, nor, for), use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet, so, or, nor, for). Place a comma before the coordinating conjunction. Second, the writer can use a semicolon alone or with a transitional expression by employing a

semicolon or, in some situations, a colon or a dash (e.g., however, at any rate, in contrast, as a result, and etc.). Third, separate the independent clauses into sentences; this is particularly useful when one of the independent clauses is particularly long. Forth, the writer can restructure the sentence by subordinating one of the parts if one of the independent clauses appears to be less important than the other.

### **Unawareness of Logical Relations between Sentences**

A sentence relation is a meaning created just by placing two sentences next to each other in a text. Sentence relations have two main characteristics that have to be borne in mind if the writers are trying to discover and understand one in a text. First, relation involves two sentence means that the meaning created by placing two sentences together. Second, the second sentence indicates the specific meaning (Fanning, 2012). The writers must be aware about the logical relation holding between sentences so that they can develop the paragraph correctly and there is no digression that will distorts the flow of the text.

### **Poor Paragraph Development**

Learners' problem in writing English is poor paragraph development, which is related to coherence issues. When creating a conversation, consistency is crucial. A written speech unit comprising many sentences describing a concept and a full stop at the end. The coherence of a lengthy text is determined by the consistency of each paragraph or section. When students fail to recognize the form of a paragraph as a series of related sentences that develop a single central theme, they are said to have weak paragraph development (Fareh, 2014).

### **Cohesion Problem**

The grammatical and lexical connecting that binds a text or sentence together and gives it meaning is known as cohesion. Cohesion is the use of elements such as repetition, pronouns, transitional expressions, and other cohesive indications to guide readers and illustrate how different parts of a text relate to one another in writing (Nordquist, 2017). Cohesion, on the other hand, refers to a text's logical links at the sentence level. The grammatical and lexical links between the elements of written creation are referred to as this word (Kaplan,

2014). Finally, cohesiveness is the process of connecting and linking sentences, which is a crucial part of writing. However, EFL writings were frequently graded based on individual sentences, rather than the overall cohesion of the material created.

### **Improper Use of Discourse Markers**

Discourse markers are terms that illustrate how discourse is created and can indicate sentential roles that exist between sentences in a text (Swan, 2005). The connective *and*, for example, denotes an addition relationship, whereas *but* denotes a sentential contrast relationship between phrases. Because they signal the logical relationships that exist between phrases in a text, connectives play a crucial role in building contextual cohesiveness. Discourse markers also provide information on the learners' pragmatic skill in the target language, according to (Garcia, 2009). Discourse markers, it can be argued, play a significant part in the cohesiveness and coherence of a work, and writers must use them correctly.

### **Coherence Problem**

A text is coherent if it meets two criteria: first, it must be compatible with the context in which it was generated, and second, it must have cohesion, which means that all portions of the text must be related by cohesive devices (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). In other terms, a paragraph or text is coherent if each sentence contributes to the development of the paragraph's theme. Because there is unity of ideas throughout sentences and paragraphs, coherent literature is easier to read and understand.

### **Absence of Parallel Structure**

The use of the same pattern of words to demonstrate that two or more ideas are of equal importance is known as parallel structure. This might happen at the level of the word, phrase, or clause. Coordinate portions of a sentence, such as items in a series or list, share the same grammatical form in a parallel structure. All nouns, verbs, participles, and so on must be included in a series. Parallel sentences are frequently joined by a coordinating conjunction like *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*. Text with a parallel structure has more authority and clarity.

## **Pragmatic Error**

Pragmatics is the study how people use language in real life. In a globalized world, pragmatics education is necessary and important. The reason for this is because English is now utilized by people all over the world to engage and communicate with one another in order to conduct international business or attend academic conferences (McKay, 2002). Being conversant with other cultures and pragmatics is vital for preventing misinterpretation caused by cultural differences. Pragmatics research focuses on the appropriateness of intercultural dialogues. The intercultural communication competence of English speakers should be improved by mastering pragmatics.

However, pragmatics and language use are rarely covered in foreign language textbooks. That is most likely why foreign language learners make subtle errors that are not always apparent in terms of grammatical accuracy. The impact of pragmatic inaccuracy is often overlooked by EFL students and teachers (Harlig and Dornyei) (1998). Words, statements, sentences, or even paragraphs that, while grammatically correct, do not fit the situation, fail to reflect the writer's intended meaning, or create misunderstanding or unhappiness to the intended reader are examples of pragmatic errors. In this study the pragmatic errors only focus on three categories, they are miss-selection of lexical item, maxim violation and overuse of qualifiers.

## **Miss-selection of Lexical Item**

Miss-selection of lexical item is a process in which pupils employ one lexical item instead of another due to a misunderstanding of the item's meaning. Students make this mistake due to a lack of lexical competence, which may be influenced by L1. Students frequently employ the wrong term in the wrong context, making the sentence ambiguous and occasionally incoherent (Fareh, 2014). In terms of grammar, the misused word sound is correct, but in terms of language use, it is incorrect. Lexical errors can occur in a variety of situations, obstructing communication, and are less accepted by readers than syntactic faults (Carter, 1998).

## **Maxim Violation**

People engaging in any sort of discourse want to express their messages, since languages have arisen and grown throughout human history based on the necessity for communication. The cooperative

principle and the cooperative maxims are the rules that people follow to communicate effectively (Grice, 1975). Moreover, Grice defines four “specific maxims” or “sub maxims”, namely maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner.

### **Overuse Qualifier**

A qualifier, such as *very*, is a word or phrase that comes before an adjective or adverb and increases or decreases the quality of the word it modifies (Nordquist, 2017). Qualifiers can be useful in creating text since they show the reader how confident the writer is in the information he is providing. In academic writing, authors must clearly state whether their beliefs or claims are certain, likely, unlikely, or simply wrong.

### **Method**

Qualitative approached by using content analysis was employed in this study. According to (Mayring, 2000) content analysis is a method that will be kept as the foundation for a qualitatively oriented procedure of text interpretation. As a result, content analysis is a text-analysis method for understanding interview transcripts and other research papers, such as attempts to identify macrolinguistic problems in essays written by university students at one of Banten's public universities.

The participants of this study were forty English department students in one of the public universities in Banten who are currently in the sixth semester who have passed academic writing course. The data were collected through the documents or students' essays to find out the macro-linguistic errors in English essay written by the students. The essay is argumentative essay. There was also a semi-structured interview to find out the possible cause of students' errors writing the essay. Then the data was analyzed by applying three procedures proposed by (Miles, Huberman and Sadana, 2014) namely data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusion or verification.

### **Discussion**

The researchers found seven types of error at the discoursal level and two types of error at the pragmatic level. In the discoursal level, the researchers found run-on sentences, unawareness of logical relation between sentences, poor paragraph development, cohesion

problem, improper use of discourse markers, coherence problem, and absence of parallel structure. In the pragmatic level, the researchers found miss-selection of lexical item and maxim violation.

### **Run- On Sentences**

When two or more independent clauses are not connected appropriately, the result is a run-on sentence.

Teacher is figure that very important in education system, teacher also very determine the success the students, especially in teaching and learning in the class.

**(Datum AK/01/DE/RS)**

The run-on statement is exemplified above. A comma splice is when two or more independent clauses are only connected by a comma. Fareh (2014) claims that pupils are unaware of several basic textual rules relating to paragraph organization. They believe that a text is nothing more than a collection of sentences that aren't bound by punctuation standards. Sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and spelling were frequently the main concerns of the students.

### **Unawareness of Logical Relations Between Sentences**

Here is the example of student's unawareness of logical relations between sentences.

Teacher is someone who could be **example for the students. The qualities of education**, that were good or bad is determined by the teacher quality standards.

**(Datum AK/01/DE/LR)**

From the example, the topic sentence is teacher as the example for the students, but the student did not mention a sentence that supports the topic sentence. The student mentioned the qualities of education that is not logically related to idea mentioned in the topic sentence.

### **Poor Paragraph Development**

Here is the example of student's poor paragraph development

*\*Good Qualities of Teacher\**

Teacher is **figure that very important** in education system, teacher also very determine the success the students, especially in teaching and learning in the class. Teacher is **someone who could be example** for the students. The qualities of education, that were good or bad is determined by **teacher quality standards**.

**(Datum AK/01/DE/PD)**



The example demonstrates that the paragraph is made up of a series of interconnected sentences that do not build a single major idea. Instead, the kids write a series of disjointed and unrelated statements that do not form a logical unit. The transition from one topic to the next is incoherent, demonstrating poor paragraph development.

### **Cohesion Problem**

The grammatical and lexical connecting that binds a text or sentence together and gives it meaning is known as cohesion. A text should have a sense of continuity and a smooth flow of ideas (Fareh, 2014).

The teacher who loves **they** work as a teacher would find art in teaching and they would find something comfort and interest to share more knowledge to their students.

**(Datum AK/01/DE/CP1)**

The pronoun 'they' has no antecedent, causing the paragraph to be disjointed. A noun is referred to by a pronoun. To generate continuity, the student should state the noun first, followed by the pronoun, or use the correct pronoun. The usage of references reveals the paragraph's unity to some level, as well as the ideas' relation to the major issue. The paragraph's cohesion will be distorted if references are used incorrectly.

### **Improper Use of Discourse Markers**

The learners' poor renderings of connectives imply that they are unaware of how to use them correctly since they have not been properly educated or prepared to do so (Fareh, 2014).

When they love what are they doing, so they qualities is of course will improve, **but** don't forget to upgrading training they skills to improve quality standard of teacher that's very important.

**(Datum AK/04/DE/DM)**

The examples above show that the pupils are unaware of how to use connectives correctly. The first example shows that the pupils are unfamiliar with the connective 'but', which is used to highlight contrast between two phrases. In the example it is said about the qualities of teacher will improve, next the student said about upgrading training. "Improve" and "upgrade" have the similar meaning, so it is better to use connective 'and' to indicate same, similar, or equal.

## Coherence Problem

Most of the issues students have with writing cohesive texts comes from their failure to sustain information flow of senses in their paragraphs and texts; they jump from one concept to the next, making the text unintelligible.

\*The Good Qualities of Teacher\*

Teacher is **figure** that very important in education system, teacher also very determine the success the students, especially in teaching and learning in the class. Teacher is someone who could be **example for the students. The qualities of education**, that were good or bad is determined by the teacher quality standards.

(Datum AK/01/DE/CP<sub>2</sub>)

The example shows that the paragraph is lack of coherence. The paragraph should clearly establish the main idea. However, each sentence in the paragraph has its own theme that is unrelated to the main topic. The learner jumps from one notion to the next, making the text incomprehensible.

## Absence of Parallel Structure

When compiling a list of things, EFL students frequently include phrases or clauses that are not parallel. Their writing becomes clumsy and disjointed because of this practice (Fareh, 2014).

A good teacher is **like a great teacher, focusing on the positive and never letting students lose hope.**

(Datum DT/03/DE/AP)

The use of the same pattern of words to demonstrate that two or more ideas are of equal importance is known as parallel structure. Different series are shown in the example: noun phrase and verb phrase. The learner appears to be unaware of the parallel structure in the instances above. The grammatical form of the list above should be the same. A sequence of items must all be nouns, verbs, or participles, and so on.

## Mis- selection of lexical item

Students frequently employ the wrong term in the wrong context, making the sentence ambiguous and occasionally incoherent. (Fareh, 2014).

I do believe if you follow all of them, you will increase your **habit** while you were teaching the class.

(Datum SA/03/PE/MS)

The example demonstrates that the word "habit" is inappropriate in the statement. To make the context clear and connect to how the teacher

teaches the students, the word "habit" should be replaced with "performance".

## **Maxim violation**

### **a. Violation of Quality Maxim**

Students are **most affected** by the quality of their teacher.

**(Datum DW/01/PE/MX/QL)**

Making overgeneralizations or providing insufficient or no evidence or support for claims/ideas are examples of quality maxim violations. That is, their poor expressive ability makes it difficult for them to provide appropriate supporting information, causing them to breach the quality maxim.

### **b. Violation of Quantity Maxim**

According to (Fareh, 2014), in this form of failure, pupils frequently add unnecessary sentences and concepts. Students' writing becomes repetitious, monotonous, and uninformative.

**The teacher** not only must teach how the subject or material in the class, but also **have responsibility to teach good morals and manners** to the students. Because how students' behavior depends on teacher or **parents** who teach them. So, it is important to **teacher and parents to have responsibility about teach a good morals and manners**, not only just teaching the subject matter.

**(Datum AK/03/PE/MX/QN)**

Students were required to write a paragraph about a teacher's positive traits. The first sentence, which is designed to establish the guiding idea, has the phrase 'not only must teach how the subject or material in the class', which should not be there. The second statement has nothing to do with the topic sentence's governing premise, which is that it is the teacher's obligation to teach students appropriate morals and manners. The pupils did not provide more information regarding excellent morals and manners until the last sentence, making the paragraph less informative and a violation of the quantity maxim.

### **c. Violation of Manner Maxim**

Students who have experienced this form of failure are more likely to write unclear and ambiguous phrases that do not convey a clear message (Fareh, 2014).

A good teacher is like a great leader, **focusing on the positive**, and never **letting students lose hope**.

**(Datum DT/03/PE/MX/M)**

The example above indicates that the students produce a sentence that is lack of clarity, and ambiguous. The student did not explain more about 'the positive' and 'students lose hope'. Students should be as specific as possible in their writing, avoiding ambiguity and vagueness.

### **The Possible Cause of These Errors**

From the data which were gathered from the interview with the students, the researchers found that the performance of the student's writing is still not good enough. The students also have lack interest in writing even they do not like writing at the session of interview. The reason is the students said that they feel writing is difficult for them. They face many problems in writing. The most common problem is to use the correct and appropriate grammar. They felt that grammar is complex and difficult to learn.

Besides grammar, they also said that they have problems in developing the idea, mastering the vocabulary, using the discourse makers and punctuation, constructing the cohesion and coherence in the paragraph. The students got difficulties to formulate and develop their own idea of writing. The students said, they got difficulties to formulate and develop their own idea of writing. The difficulties lead them to construct their idea to the cohesive and coherent paragraph as well.

From the interview, the students admit that their vocabulary mastery was still low because they are still not familiar with the English word. It caused them to commit the error in the selection of the lexical item. The students also said that they feel confused to use the appropriate discourse markers and punctuation when they write. However, when the researchers inquired about their efforts to improve their writing skills, the most common effort students make to improve their writing skills is reading English, which they do with the help of the lecturer's guidebook.

However, the student said that they are seldom to read the book even they said that the book is less helpful, and they prefer to use the internet than the book from the lecturer. It indicates that the use of the book as guided writing is less desirable by students. From those reasons, it can be concluded that the first negative language transfers caused students write the sentences as well as when they are talking which is eventually causes the errors in writing sentence it is called interlingual errors. Corder (1981) who explains about transfer, he

states that, “the learner is carrying over the habits of his mother-tongue into the second language.” As he stated, When the native and target languages are similar, learning a target language is simple through positive transfer; but, when they are not, learning that language (target language) is difficult and results in negative transfer, which leads to errors. However, based on their efforts to enhance their writing skills, the errors are not solely due to interference from their mother tongue, but also the learners have not really acquired the knowledge because of the difficult of language itself. Finally, a lack of writing practice and supervision is a significant influence in pupils' poor performance. Therefore, there must be revolutionary efforts to improve the learners' potential in English communication together with the enhancement of English teaching manner at colleges (Sidik, et. al., 2021) as well as the writing materials which provide stimulus to encourage the students to learn (Kirana, et. al., 2018).

## **Conclusion**

It may be concluded from the discussion that the students made macrolinguistic errors at both the discourse and pragmatic levels, indicating that the students' ability to produce and develop stretches of language larger than a sentence is still limited. Furthermore, there are several possible explanations of these errors, including a lack of vocabulary, grammatical mastery, lack of attention, and the teacher's delivery manner. As a result, EFL students should seek to achieve maximum proficiency in the target language by intensive reading, listening, and writing, as well as be conscious of their mistakes and prevent repeating them in their future learning.

Moreover, EFL teachers are also expected to focus on the errors do the students commit to writing an essay. They must create the situation in learning process more enjoyable for the students to enhance student's motivation in learning writing. In learning writing, Students' pragmatic and discourse competencies should be enhanced in the classroom by focusing not only on the accuracy of linguistic forms but also on the functional uses of language to achieve native-like proficiency, primarily in the flow of information.

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